

Notes on British Butterflies, Summer and Autumn, 1974

By Dr. C. J. LUCKENS*

The windy changeable weather of late June merged into the first days of July. Remission finally came on the 3rd, and a stretch of heath on the eastern fringe of the New Forest held good numbers of male *Plebejus argus* L.

The rare Kentish f. *cretaceus* Tutt of this same butterfly was the main object of my search when I went with the family to the Folkestone Warren on 6th July. A good variety of other butterfly species were seen, including *Polygonia c-album* L., *Melanargia galathea* L., *Polyommatus icarus* Rott., *Aricia agestis* Schiff. and a single late *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. I failed once again to find *cretaceus* however, in spite of ideal weather and dogged searching. The Warren is a difficult place to cover entirely, and I haven't yet given up hopes of eventual success.

Later in the day my father and my elder son went on with me to Blean Woods, where we braved the hordes of *Formica rufa* in order to check on a colony of *Mellicta athalia* Rott. This proved to be much weaker than in 1973 (*Vide* 1974 *Ent. Record*, Vol. 86, p. 190) and the Cow wheat was almost submerged under bracken, but 300 yards further on there had been recent coppicing of chestnuts over a large area, and already a few *athalia* had moved in.

The following day was a red letter one for us all, when we were able to add *Nymphalis polychloros* L. to our British list (*Vide Ent. Record*, 87: 61).

The sun shone for the next two days after our return to Southampton, and I envied my parents who continued to see *polychloros* back at the same site in Sussex. It was something of a consolation though to go to a New Forest enclosure on 9th July and see several *Argynnis cydippe* L. in fast and vigorous flight over the bracken.

Thereafter dull and cold weather predominated, with occasional breaks, until well after the middle of July. *Limenitis camilla* L. and *Argynnis paphia* L. were both down in numbers in the Forest, and I personally saw no females of the latter species until the end of the month. *P. argus* however, was still fresh and in good numbers on Beaulieu Heath on 19th July.

I drove to Alice Holt in the late afternoon of 20th July—a superb day. On arrival at about 4.45 p.m., the first butterfly to greet me as I got out of the car was a male *Apatura iris* L., flying straight at me as if to imperiously brush me aside. A few moments later, another *iris* flew across to an oak seething with *Thecla quercus* L., and was immediately seen off by two of these comparative midgets. Further on, a large dark butterfly hovering over the path proved to be yet another Purple Emperor. This had settled when I reached the spot and was imbibing the little moisture remaining in a copralithic fragment on the ground. *Limenitis camilla* L. was also about in excellent numbers in this wood.

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A stretch of downland near Stockbridge, holds populations of six out of the eight British Skippers; but I could only find a single example of one of these species, *Thymelicus lineola* Ochs., on 26th July. *Argynnis aglaia* L. was common though very worn, and *Lysandra coridon* Poda. was also in its usual abundance in this locality.

August commenced well, with fine weather, and a successful visit to the West Sussex woods; and there I met Mr. A. Creber and Mr. K. A. Harrison on the 1st of the month.

The first sighting of note was a male *A. iris* flying high up around a large clearing. *L. camilla*, *A. paphia* and *T. quercus* were all out but well past their best; and the second brood of *Leptidea sinapis* L. was very strongly in evidence in one stretch of woodland. Female *sinapis* were seen ovipositing on young plants of Birds-foot Trefoil. All three of us were fortunate enough to find an *iris* ovum each during the course of the afternoon.

A week later I returned to another area of the same wood, and after a further search spotted a newly hatched *iris* larva. Yet another ovum found in Alice Holt on 9th August, completed my trio—unfortunately however, the larva from the first ovum died soon after hatching.

During our stay, in the first week of August, with my parents at their home in Sussex, we visited a small chalk quarry near Lewes. This is one of the only places I know where one can be reasonably certain of finding *Eumenis semele* L. in East Sussex. Several were seen but not so plentifully as in 1970 and 1973. *Celastrina agiolus* L. seemed to be making a minor comeback, and a few were noted along the dogwood hedges of the downland fringe, and also around my parents' garden which is always a good draw for this butterfly.

We returned to Southampton on the 8th and on St. Catherine's Down near Winchester, there were plenty of *L. coridon* flying. I examined a fair number of these blues, then, and on later occasions during the month, but found only one aberration, a *post-obseleta*, on 23rd August.

There was also a good showing of *coridon* at Worth Matravers in Dorset on 16th August, but ab. *fowleri*, that I covet, proved elusive. I walked to the *coridon* ground via the Winspit, and it was interesting to see *Thymelicus actaeon* Rott. appear as soon as the sea came into view. This sprightly little butterfly was common all along the coastline, and many were in surprisingly good condition. I saw several fresh *Pieris brassicae* L. come in over the cliffs from the Channel.

A few *C. argiolus* put in an appearance in and around Southampton during the last week in August—one along one of the busiest roads in the city, seemingly impervious to the exhaust fumes.

We revisited the Stockbridge down on 24th and 26th August, in order to assess the strength of *Hesperia comma* L., and found it as abundant as ever. In fact this generally rather scarce skipper is only surpassed in numbers there by *Maniola jurtina* L.

L. coridon is also very common but there is little or no variation from the type.

Gales in the first week of September seemed to have virtually no effect on *coridon* population, and both sexes were flying well past the middle of the month. *P. icarus* and *A. agestis* were also out at Westbury on 6th September, but to our disappointment there was no sign of *L. bellargus*.

This butterfly was also inexplicably absent from a site in East Sussex on 14th September. In mid-June I had failed to find its first brood here, and this was a widespread and strong colony as recently as 1970.

Right at the end of September some *M. jurtina* were fresh on St. Catherine's Hill, Winchester, and this locality was also favoured by many *Aglais urticae* L. attracted by scabious flowers. *Vanessa atalanta* L. was rather uncommon this year, but we had a few in our garden during the Autumn, and more *c-album* than usual. The Commas mostly favoured *Sedum spectabile* and Michaelmas Daisies, but several times during October I noticed that roses also seemed oddly attractive.

After the splendid season of 1973, this year was generally a disappointment in respect of population numbers of the butterflies. However, I found, much to my surprise, that in spite of less travel I had actually seen more variety than ever before in a single season—a total of 50 butterfly species being found in one stage or other during the year.

Current Literature

Stick and Leaf Insects by J. T. Clark. viii + 65 pp., 42 line drawings. Winchester: Barry Shurlock & Co., 1974. £1.50.

The culture of tropical stick-insects has spread during recent years, so that amateurs may maintain stocks of several different species—as well as the cultures in many colleges and schools. This book provides an accurate account of the stick-insect species obtainable in this country, with an introduction to insects for those with little previous knowledge. Stick-insect structure, behaviour and general biology, and the practical business of caging, are all covered, with explanatory line drawings and a useful glossary. The species available here are described in detail, with accurate accounts of egg structure, development of the nymphs, and the origin of the different species. For schools and colleges, some experiments are described, with useful suggestions for further study projects. References are given in each chapter for those stimulated to further reading, although the ability to read in French or German is often necessary for the more specialised works.

This excellent book can only foster and encourage the developing interest in stick and leaf insects.—JUDITH A. MARSHALL.